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2-13-2003

Diane L. Rowe interview for a Wright State University History Course

Paul Downing

Diane L. Rowe

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Repository Citation

Downing, P., & Rowe, D. L. (2003). Diane L. Rowe interview for a Wright State University History Course. . https://corescholar.libraries.wright.edu/history_oral_history/26

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In this interview, Beavercreek, Ohio resident Diane Rowe talks about living and working in the Dayton area. Diane is a thirty nine year old dental assistant who works in a small office in Oakwood, a tiny suburb just south of downtown.

She begins the interview by talking a bit about her days as a youngster growing up in north Dayton, taking dance lessons and dreaming of being a Rockette. Diane then goes on to talk about attending Patterson Co-Op high school in downtown Dayton. It was there that she realized that a career in the field of dentistry was for her.

Diane tells the interviewer about beginning her career for a dentist and finding her current employer, for whom she has worked for twenty years. She started this path in an office on the top floor of the Third National Building downtown. She talks about the energy and liveliness of downtown in the eighties and gushes about the fun of eating and people-watching at places like Rike's and the Metropolitan.

Now that she works in an office in Oakwood, owned by the same dentist, she is able to contrast and compare working life in the suburbs to what it once was downtown. She has some funny stories about the quirkiness of Oakwood and the people who live there.

Mrs. Rowe also gives the details about her family life and tells what it is like to live in the area today. She talks about a son who is learning to drive, a stepdaughter who gave birth to her first grandchild, and her husband Mike. Mike Rowe has worked for General Motors in Dayton since he finished attending Beavercreek High School and Diane tells of his plans after retirement in the next few years. She has a funny story about an overturned pickup truck during one on her husband's hunting trips and also relates what it is like helping to raise her granddaughter.

To conclude the interview, Diane talks about her plans of traveling after she retires, which may not be for quite some time if she stays as happy working as she is now. No matter what though, she definitely wants to continue to live in the Dayton area in order to stay close to her family and friends.

This interview takes place on a Thursday evening at her current office in Oakwood. The office was closed, and aside from the smell of rubbing alcohol and sterilized needles and drills in the air, the atmosphere was very laid back. One can listen to the interview with Diane and hear funny stories about growing up with brothers and sisters and even more funny stories about the Oakwood atmosphere and what it is like to work in a dental office.

Yes, this is Paul Downing. Today is Thursday February thirteenth and I'm about to do an interview with Mrs. Diane Rowe. We are at her place of employment, which is a private dental office on Park Avenue in Oakwood.

Why don't you start off by telling me your full name and where you were born and when?

My name is Diane L. Rowe and I was born here in Dayton Ohio at Good Samaritan Hospital.

Do you mind telling me when?

I was born in 1963 and I had two older brothers at the time. One was three years older, one was a year older and when I was two and a half, I had twin sisters that were born.

Were they close? Were they like a clique? Could you hang out with them?

I couldn't stand them because they took all my attention. I was the youngest and I was the girl and I had it made until those twins came along. They drove me nuts.

Where did you grow up?

In north Dayton.

What did you like to do as a kid?

Antagonize my brothers and sisters.

Did you play any sports or anything?

Nope, we took ballet lessons. All my sisters and I were dancers.

Where did you take lessons at?

We took lessons right in north Dayton near Fairport Elementary School where we all went to grade school, then we moved on and took classes in Huber heights. And I danced until I was seventeen because I loved it.

Any aspirations to do it professionally?

Yes, I was going to be a Rockette! I meant to be a Rockette until my boss found me and I'm still here twenty years later wondering when I'm going to go and be a Rockette. (laughter)

Well, I hope that works out for you. Where did you go to high school?

Patterson Co-Op in downtown Dayton. I graduated in 1981.

Did you co-op?

Yep.

While you were working?

In a dental office when I was fifteen. I started working off and on. School on, work off every other two weeks for three years at the same doctor's office.

Where was that?

Dr. Farney's office in downtown Dayton, in the Harries Building.

Where is the Harries Building?

Corner of First and Main.

How did you decide that you wanted to do that? That you wanted to go into the dental field?

That's what interested me at Co-Op. We tried beautician, secretarial, accounting, and medical and I just liked being in the dental stuff so I stuck with it.

I see, and you were there at Patterson for four year? Was that a four-year school?

Yep, four year school.

So when you got out you had a job...

Had a job and I kept that co-op job three years then I moved on to another dental office, where I am today.

Any other odd jobs while you were in high school?

Just babysitting.

Okay. So after high school you worked for the dentist that you were working for during you co-op?

Yes, for about two and a half years.

You stayed down there?

Mmm Hmmm

And then after that where did you go?

I went to my current employer Dr. Herman and I'm still here almost twenty years later.

How did you change jobs?

I quit my other job and took some time off to help out my mom who had a fall and she had a couple of broken bones. I helped out with my sisters and driving. Anyway, this other doctor's office, I had a friend there and she called to ask if I would help out part-time and I did. And then I just, it just turned into full-time and I'm still here.

What was downtown like when you worked down there?

Very cool.

Yeah?

Rikes was there, the Metropolitan was there. Lunch hour was never enough.

So was downtown a lot different than it is today?

Yes.

What are the differences? What do you see different today?

There is a downtown, back then there was a downtown. I don't think there is one anymore. I would never go to downtown Dayton at all.

What about now that they have the new Schuster Center or the ballpark?

I mean, I have been to a couple of Dragons games, and I would go to the Schuster Center. I've been to memorial Hall and the Victoria a couple of times. I like to do that type of thing, but, just downtown twenty years ago when you worked and you could go to lunch and get your lunch anywhere; from a stand on courthouse square or you could go up to Rike's and eat in the great dining room they had and just people watch. It was fun.

Okay, and let's see, now, are you married?

Yes.

Any children?

I have two children. I've been married almost eighteen years. I have a stepchild and she is now almost twenty-two. She was four when we got married, and we have a son of our own. He's sixteen.

Okay. How and when did you meet your husband?

I met my husband when I was twenty or twenty-one at a small little bar where a bunch of guys went to when he got off work at midnight at General Motors. And , a girlfriend of mine worked there and she didn't have a car for a while, so I had to pick her up. She was staying with me for a while in my apartment and she called me one night for a ride. And, my husband was in there and I met him and that was that.

He was working at GM then?

Mmm Hmm

Is he still working for GM?

He's still there. He went there out of high school and he's been there going on twenty five years.

When you two were married, how did you decide to stay in the Miami Valley?

His job there at General motors was still going strong, and, so we just stayed here. And I would never leave my family. I just, we don't spread out all over the place. We like to be around each other.

How much family do you have in the area now?

Both of my sisters and one brother. My other brother is in West Virginia and he's been there since college in the early eighties.

What does he do?

He is a maintenance man at a Christian college in Parkersburg West Virginia. And he's now divorced, but that's been his life for the last twenty years so he's still there. He's got a lot of medical problems. Actually he's awaiting a kidney transplant right now. So he's had some bad luck, a couple of accidents, and a couple of amputations on both of his legs. So he's not in very good health, but he just chose to stay there.

And your sisters are still in the area?

My sisters are married and in the area. One is married to a former Dayton policeman and the other sister is married to a driver for the Frito-Lay Company.

So you get free chips then?

Every family get together, he brings the chips.

Okay, so you get free police protection from one sister and free chips from another ...

Yep.

What about your brother?

What do I get from him? Constant headaches.

What's his name?

Dale.

Okay and Dale still lives in the area?

Dale lives in Troy. He married somebody from Troy, and he has a son. He is now divorced, but he's still up there where his son goes to school.

How old is his son?

Michael is nine.

Alright, so did you and Dale get along together well?

We got along at not getting along. That was our job, to antagonize each other for years.

But things have changed certainly?

Not much, that's all we do is drive each other nuts. He calls me or faxes me blonde jokes. Or he calls me long distance to tell me the latest blonde joke he has heard. That's just his mission in life.

Because you're blonde.

Yes. Naturally.

Okay, you said you had a son and a daughter. How old is your son?

Sixteen.

His name?

His name is Joshua.

Alright, and where does Josh go to school?

Josh goes to Beavercreek High School, where his sister graduated and his dad graduated.

And what are his plans? Does he know?

His plans are just day to day where he's going to ride his skateboard. And when we're going to get moving on getting his driver's license.

Is he driving a lot now?

He's learning to drive now. He drives whenever I can stand it.

He skateboards a lot, huh?

Constantly

Are there places to do that around here?

There's a few. They're getting more as time goes on.

Okay, your daughter, what's her name?

Kristin.

What does she do?

She does just odd jobs here and there. She's busy raising a baby. I am a grandmother at thirty-nine. And, she has a five month old little girl. She is married and they both work. They're learning at being parents and we're learning at being grandparents.

How's that working out?

Wonderful.

Okay.

Unless I take the kid to work, not what's a whole other story. Then I get into trouble.

So you have to pull double duty as daycare?

Sometimes I have to pull double duty.

Are your parents still living?

My dad is.

Where does he live?

He lives in Darke County near Arcanum Ohio.

Where's that in relation to Dayton?

It's a 'fur' piece north.

'Fur' piece?

. (laughing). Fur piece. That's Darke County talk

Okay.

It's about an hour and a half drive from central Dayton.

Do you see your father often?

Not as often as I should, especially since I'm the grandparent of his great granddaughter, no.

How often does the entire family get together?

My dad's side, usually just at Christmas unless he sees a few of us on occasional weekends. My mom's side of the family, we have a cousins reunion every year in October in Indiana, and it's been going on for almost thirty years.

My goodness.

All the cousins and their kids and everybody gets together for a weekend at a state park in Indiana.

How many people is it?

It's whittling down a little bit, but it usually averages about eighty to a hundred people.

Okay, why don't you tell me about your working situation a little bit now. You said you used to work downtown, but you no longer do.

In 1986, Dr. Herman moved his office from the Third national Bank building, to floor, right downtown, and we are out in Oakwood now. In a little office that's been going. He, he became ill about four years ago and we had to bring in another doctor to help out. And after that another doctor and he seems to want to stay put for a while. We have a lot of fun.

Well that's good.

We do.

What kind of patients do you have? Who are they, where do they come from?

These patients, I don't know how they found Dr. Herman, but they come from all over. Way north, way south. We have some that come from out of state still to see us. And I've known my patients twenty years. Most of them are like my family. And it's just a nice, very small office. We try to keep it small. It's a very good office to work in.

So are you like Erin Brockovich, do you have the phone numbers memorized?

I do. I know them all. I know their pharmacies, I know their parents, I know their sisters. . I can find them all.

So with the changeup of doctors they probably come to see you now, don't they?

Yes. They don't care who works on their teeth. They just say as long as I'm here they'll come in.

I see, well...

That's no lie.

So you've been working in Oakwood for how long now?

Since 1986.

Alright. What are the differences between working in the suburbs versus working downtown?

Well, you have to get in your car when you go to lunch. You can't walk around. Oakwood's a different little town to be in. We get in the car and we head down to Brown Street or we head out towards Kettering if we go to lunch.

I see. This building next door here, it looks like it's in quite a state of disrepair. What's that building? What are they doing?

That is the Oakwood city offices. It did include the police station and fire station. I think they're going to keep it that way. It's under construction. They're redoing it. And they now have four trailers sitting in front. Oakwood's a weird place to do repair work and construction. You have to have a permit for everything and there's this little Oakwood group that has to approve everything, and I think it's quite complicated.

Right out here it looks like there's not much parking out here. Do you have places to park? Are they going to do anything about that?

I don't know. I don't know, parking is weird. If you park somewhere somebody's going to tell you to move. Either the neighbors that live around here, they're quite the little group of people. I don't think they like having businesses in their backyard.

So it's kind of an eccentric bunch?

It's an eccentric bunch.

I see. Well enough of work. What do you do in your free time? What do you like to do?

I like to steal my granddaughter and keep her and play with her. And I go shopping, like all women.

At the same time? Do you take her with you?

I have.

Alright!

She's helped me make decisions because when she starts getting fussy I just grab it and go. I don't think about it.

Well that's a good excuse then, I guess.

Yeah.

So living in Beavercreek, you must do a lot of shopping at the Fairfield Mall.

The mall's okay. It's not bad..

Anywhere else in particular.?

Dayton Mall, Elder-Beerman. I don't...Wal-Mart, I don't discriminate.

You'll shop anywhere.

I'll shop anywhere, any reason. For home, for the office, I'll shop.

Alright. What about your husband, what are his pastimes?

He a deer hunter, and a fisherman.

Does he go often?

He goes almost every weekend from the first of October through Christmas.

I see. Does he always come back with game?

Uh, no. But, he usually comes back with a story about something.

I see. Does he camp, is he gone all weekend?

Yeah, he camps on private property. We've got a new trailer and it supposedly sleeps four, but it's comfortable for two hunters and all their gear.

Does he ever come back with any funny stories about...

Oh yeah. He's got a couple of friends he hunts with and they tend to get him into trouble.

I see. Anything you remember in particular?

Yeah a friend of his rolled a brand new truck over in a pond because he was driving on a levee and he was looking off the other way and the truck went down and it flipped over upside down. My husband almost went in after him but he did get out of the truck and came up. And it's pretty scary but they're laughing about it today.

Oh, you were asking about working out in the suburbs as opposed to downtown and the neighbors around here. Some of them are kind of different. They all have their routines. We have a little old lady across the street who won't let us park in front of her house because the leaves might blow against the curb and mess up her whole lawn routine. She's a little different. We have a neighbor behind us and we're all kind of buddies. He takes care of us. We've gone out the door to go

to lunch and realized we had no keys and we locked ourselves out of the office. No way to get in our cars and standing in the rain, and no way to eat lunch until another coworker came an hour later. And the neighbor saw us out there and we asked for a hammer to break the window. He just gave us the keys to his truck and take it to lunch and he'd see us in an hour. He's a good guy. We help each other out. He shovels our walks. When we pull in in the morning after a snowstorm he's out there shoveling our walk for us. It's nice, it's different to be out here and know the people as opposed to wandering around downtown and not knowing what's going on. But, it's nice.

Well what do you expect out of your career in the future? Do you expect to be in Oakwood another twenty years?

Well, probably with the same office and the same patients for another twenty years. I don't know if we'll stay in this building. I don't like change, as you've probably noticed. I do everything the same. Dr. Herman's a second-generation dentist. His father was a dentist before him.. He has a son who's an oral surgeon and a grandson who is heading into dental school soon. So, I could be working with a fourth generation dentist.

I see, so you must have seen a lot of changes over the years.

Well, I did not know Dr. Herman's dad when he worked. I knew he was here but I hadn't met him at the time, and yeah, things are a little different. You can't do nowadays what he did back then. He had a few little funny things happen. He had a patient in the dental chair one time for a filling and he had him bite down on cotton and told him he had to keep dry for a little while. The doctor took off and went out to lunch and he thought his nurse was there. I guess she didn't know the patient was there and she went to lunch. Dr. Herman came back in and turned the lights on and there's the patient lying there in the chair with cotton in his mouth. So the doctor walked in the room and took the cotton out and looked at the tooth and put it back in and told the patient about ten more minutes and he could leave.
(laughter)

From what I hear from the patients that are coming in now, when they were kids that he was pretty scary. It wasn't as simple to do dental work as it...I mean it wasn't as simple then as it is now and I guess for the kids he was pretty scary. One child bit him and he took him over and showed him the window and looked him down...had him look down fourteen floors, and said the next time he bit him he was going to throw hi out the window. I'd love to do that now with kids but I don't think we can.

Well it's a problem when you only have a one-story building.

Yeah, one story building. I'll just bite them back.

I guess that's all you can do sometimes.

Sometimes.

Okay well it sounds like you work a lot. What about vacation? Do you vacation anywhere?

We have three weeks on Cocoa Beach in Florida every year in June and we hit it about every other year. My in-laws use it also. They go every year, we go about every other year.

Do you have a condo down there?

We have a condo. Right there, it's about right there at Cape Canaveral. So, when there's a space landing or taking-offs going on or shuttle activity, we can usually just watch it right there on the beach, which is kind of fun. It's interesting for our son. And occasional weekend trips and my family reunions in the fall. Just little weekend trips. There's a chance my stepdaughter and her husband and the baby will move out of town so that might involve a little weekend traveling if we're going to see our granddaughter and hopefully a couple other grandchildren.

Where might they move?

They might move to Athens, Ohio, near Ohio University. Jason's family is there and there's work opportunities there for him. So that might be a change they'll be making.

Well how much longer do you plan on working in the field you're in now?

I'm going to stay right here with this office until I cannot do it anymore and as long as my patients demand that I be here. All generations of them.

Well that could be a while.

That could be a while.

That doesn't bother you?

Nope.

What about your husband Mike? Is he planning on retiring from GM soon?

He's been in the factory working since the day after he graduated high school and I think he's going to work there about four or five more years. He's going to do some construction work or drive a truck part time, but he's going to get out of the factory. After that I'm sure he want to travel a little bit. He'd like to go to

Colorado. We just haven't been...I haven't been anywhere in my life, but he's traveled a little more than I have. But he'd like to get out that way.

Do you have any plans for life after work?

Is there life after work? (laughter) Oh, hopefully just be healthy and enjoy grandchildren and traveling. Be able to spend time with my family. They drive me nuts most of the time but I don't know what I'd do without them.

Do you plan on staying here in the Miami Valley?

Probably, I see my brothers and sisters staying right where they are here in town where we can all talk and run into each other and just get together. I can't imagine not living in Dayton Ohio.

Well that sounds like a pretty good place to wrap it up there. Thank you for your time.

Well you're welcome. It was nice talking to you.